

## HUNTING THE SKUNK

OLD NEW ENGLAND PASTIME WHICH IS SAID TO BE VERY EXCITING.

Pursuit of a Humble Native Animal Which Gives Zest and Profit to Farmers and Their Boys.

Springfield Republican.

Throughout the hilly farms of New England, another skunk skin crop has now been gathered in. It isn't a new crop, as is mentioned in the regular agricultural statistics, but it is an important one, nevertheless, and a very large proportion of farms, especially among the meadows of Connecticut and central Massachusetts, are now rejoicing in their store of garnered skins. In fact the skunk skin is the most important thing in the lives of fur which is still exported from the more civilized parts of New England. The mink skin is more valuable, but it is now quite rare, and the muskrat, though plenty, is so cheap as to be hardly worth the catching; but the skunk is both quite valuable and still fairly plenty, increasing and multiplying in a riotous, sinistral geometrical progression, that would let it inherit the earth in half a dozen generations if it were not for the intrepid pursuit of the small boy and the farmer. Besides, it furnishes an exhilarating sport for all in search of adventures afield. But by a certain delicacy of our sporting writers much has been left unsaid which might be said of the dangers, diseases and halfhearted escapes of skunking. This cannot be looked on otherwise than as a loss to literature.

How important a skin issue this skunk catching, in many cases, is to farmers can be seen by the fact that it is estimated that from 15,000 to 20,000 skunk skins are gathered about 50 cents apiece to their captors, were they sent out from the State of Connecticut alone last year. The prices are not so high as abroad, the prices being governed by three big sales in London, one in January, one in March and one in May. In the last of these sales there were 150,000 skins disposed of. Of these a great proportion are said to go for use as camp canvas. The skins are continental armies. With these data, we cannot refrain from remarking with surprise the people who are so anxious to factor in European warfare. Would it not be well, we ask, for the triple-skunk dog to its forces? The movement of the Russian army, when slightly hindered, would be nothing less than an open book to them—nothing at all. However, the skin now serves the armies well, so do not, in all of its other uses, for really it is a fine fur, thick and durable, and when naturally black very glossy and beautiful. It is for this reason that the black skins are preferred, as all are eventually dyed black, and the white skins when dyed are rather dull and crack with wear. In good years a black skin is worth as high as \$1.25, while a white one brings only from 75 cents to 1.00. Black and white are only comparative terms, however, as the skins are very rarely pure black and almost entirely white. For commercial purposes, however, a skin whose white band does not extend below the shoulders is black, while a white-backed animal is called white. Between these two are graded known respectively as half-black and half-white. The white and black skins, when seen to be more vigorous than the black, seem to have an unfortunate failing for black skunk skin is rather more difficult to create themselves a majority before the season is over. However, there are enough black ones left to make a catch count as black, and the average price secured for the pelts is somewhere about 20 cents.

A FRIEND OF MAN.  
On the whole, the skunk, while not a familiar, must be counted a friend of man. Although he will occasionally help himself to a half-grown chicken, his general diet is composed of bugs about the fields, and he of course devours a great many of them in a year, turning up the stones to secure them. However, he will eat anything that is meat, especially skunk—the dearest diet of skunk kind is skunk, and the trappers take advantage of this fact to lure them to an untimely fate. Trapping skunks is done chiefly in the winter and the early spring, though it may be begun when the skins first become good, in the middle of October, and continue till the middle of March. The old-fashioned figure-four trap is still popular, supporting a big stone under which the unfortunate skunk on yanking at the bait meets an abrupt and squatty death. The later fashion is, of course, to use steel traps, but neither is so popular as still hunting, because the animals die a fussy and impatient death, which leaves a good impression on the skin, and, also, it is not possible to get so many skins this way. The still hunt is rather a larger institution, but it is justified by its results, and a good dog and more are coming now to use it. The first requisite of skunk hunting is a good dog. Generally a shepherd or a cross with shepherd blood in it proves the most distinguished in this service of mankind. But almost any kind of a dog can be pressed into the service, because a good skunk dog, like a poet, is born and not made. He trains himself mostly, and makes a personal matter of his onslaught on his game. In his youth the skunk dog has apparently seen his mother insulted by some wretched skunk or something of the kind, and has devoted himself to a lifelong vendetta against the race. At all events he seldom regards the game as other than dogs do, and often a muzzle is necessary to restrain him from chewing up his skin entirely. Having a dog of this kind about your fireside, the sport of skunk hunting is as exciting. Choosing a dark, misty fall night, we secure a stout four-foot club, and, pulling on our skunk-trap costume, we ourselves out into the murky dark and on toward the open meadow, where the quarry waits in the darkness under the turned-up stones. We are apt to tread at any time on a skunk, and, if we do, it is a most familiar and gentle thing it is, so step softly, softly. How beautiful, and cool and fragrant is the night air! Ah, ah, ah, this is a stone wall. I think we have struck it, my leg appears to be broken—no, it is only slightly hurt. Let us step on it, push on, plucking the brambles from our hair and eyes, and saying as little as we can: the dog is baying. I think he has sensed a skunk in the grass, and it is ours.

WHEN YOU FIND HIM.  
When, once, in fact, the dog has run across a skunk track it is a very simple matter to secure it, as a rule. Sometimes, of course, it is a matter of luck in the wood-chuck hole, which it inhabits, or a stone wall, but generally the courageous little animal bristles calmly up to the dog and shows fight. In case he holes, and if one can follow quickly enough to catch his tail, it may be remarked in passing for those interested to try it, that it is generally safe to yank him quickly out, if you are strong enough to do so, for he makes a strong resistance, swelling up in the hole and digging his toes in. The skunk man can pull him out entire at first as strong in his grip, but in a few minutes he grows exhausted and slips gradually out. Then if anything is to be done it were well if it were done quickly, and your assistant should now the game with his club immediately, unless perchance you care to hold the animal up by its tail, when it is claimed that it is unable to harm. The fall, old hunters say, is not as commonly claimed, an aid to the ballistic properties of the animal, but it is necessary for it to have its feet on the ground to accomplish its purpose. Few, however, are interested enough in natural history to attempt this experiment.

But generally speaking no personal encounter is necessary. The pungent little animal turning to the dog as a rule offers fight and the two square off to each other. As a matter of fact, the skunk, outside of its strength as an atomizer, is no mean antagonist for a dog. It has long, sharp teeth, overlapping each other in a formidable manner and when it once fastens them in the underlip of a dog the latter hardly ever gets it off. It can do to loose its hold by putting its paws on it and tearing out its teeth from the flesh. However, before the dog can do this the hunter's part of the game comes in. He might shoot the skunk, but that would be unorthodox. He plays a nobler part. Creeping up behind, while the skunk and the dog are staring at each other, he leans forward and swats the smaller animal with his stick. If he hits, he wins; if he misses, he becomes skunked—very badly skunked.

DRESSING THE GAME.  
When the evening's sport is done and the faithful dog is moved to the far leeward of the home, it becomes necessary to dress the

produce of the chase in the woodshed appointed for skunk dressing. The skins, like others desired by dealers, are required to be "cased." To secure a "cased" skin very little curing is needed. Two slits are made down the inside of the hind legs, the hind bone is either cut or scraped out of the tail, and the whole skin is stripped forward over the body, like a glove drawn inside out from the hand. This is an easy work, especially in the fall, for all along the inside of the skin is a mass of accumulated fat, which supports the animal through the winter, and the hide slipped off as easily as the skin from a scalded tomato. An expert can skin a skunk in anywhere from one to three minutes. The skin, when removed, should be drawn fur side in over a piece of thin board or shingle, whittled down to a point in something of the shape of the sole of a tooth-pick. The pelts are then hung in a sower row on the inside of the shed or barn to await the coming of the fur gatherer.

The layer of fat under the skin was at one time a valuable by-product of the skunk industry, skunk oil being much sought cure for bruises and croup, and colds and difficulties with the breathing apparatus. It was generally rubbed on the outside of the affected part and sometimes used internally. Its "flossing" qualities were considered wonderful. Those were the palmy days of skunk's oil, when as high as \$1 a quart was secured for the oil, and as an exceptionally fat animal has been known to yield as much as a quart, many will give a pint of the liquid, it was quite profitable to try it. Now, however, for some reason, the demand for the oil has fallen off and it is no longer considered worth while to bother with securing it. There are still many people in the country that will use a skunk, ever, and, in fact, there are still some to be found who will eat the animal. To eat a skunk, the unessential must first be carefully removed, and then he must be served baked or stewed. The animal is composed of dark meat, and is rather too rich and only for most stomachs.

In the immediate vicinity, probably no town is more interested in the skunk industry than Somers, Conn., and no one of the skunk hunters there shows a more extended record of skunk mortality than William H. Meacham and Dr. J. Field, experts in every kind of hunting and skinning who have made a specialty of gathering their kind of skunk for a dozen years. With their crushed strawberry-colored dog Jack, who is a strong favorite for the northern Connecticut skunking championship, they have gathered some sixty-six prime pelts this fall, and prepared them for market. There are, however, many hunters through Tolland county, Connecticut, and the eastern part of Hampshire county, Mass., who are now on their annual visit of the fur buyer. For that district the gathering of furs is William H. Meacham, who has been in the business now for quite a number of years. He spends his falls in hunting of various kinds, and late in the season rides through many of the Tolland county towns and all the line of small places on the western edge of Hampshire county, Worcester county as far as Spencer. He drives through the places in an open buggy, taking a number of sacks with him, in which to pack the skins, which he ships by rail when he has secured a wagon full. In all he takes about a week for his trip, and last year he secured 1,500 skins, most of them skunk, but including a few mink and fox. He is now getting ready for his annual trip, and if you have not prepared your little batch of skunk skins for him you would take this as a sufficient warning of his near approach.

CORRECT NAMES OF VEHICLES.  
"Tally-ho," "Drag," "Trap" and Other Names That Are Misapplied.

Pittsburg Dispatch.  
The fact that the first coach ever brought to this country by Col. DeLancey Kane was named by its owner "the tally-ho" is no justification for twisting the meaning and enlarging upon the importance of the word, so as to make it refer to coaches generally considered. The word "tally-ho" is used in a perverted sense as applied to coaching. It is a hunting term, pure and simple.

Take the common expression that you hear on every side: "My horse has just passed by in his drag." Now, a man up in such things would expect to see a person go by with a four-in-hand turnout. Drag is the name applied to a coach when it is used privately. As soon as a four-in-hand coach is put into public service and a fare is charged for riding upon it it ceases to be a drag and becomes a coach, just as a hansom when driven publicly becomes a hansom cab. The calling of a two-horse team instead of a pair, a pair of horses is never a team unless hitched tandem. A team is something more than a pair, such as a tandem, unicorn, four-in-hand, etc., and to hear people talk about a pair of horses as a team is quite as bad as to hear a person say, "John, put that single set of harness on the bay." A single set of harness which you never hear of using as a double equipment for a set. Used in the sense of the word trap is an older expression which you never hear of using in the sense of a trap. It seems to be a generic name for all kinds of traps, and nothing is too lovely or too lovely to apply the term to. A name almost as general as rig in its significance is "dog cart." It seems as if anything having two wheels cart having a box under the seat, called a dog box for the reception of dogs, guns, game and such things.

You very seldom hear the arrangement of one horse in front of two spoken of as a unicorn; it is more usually called a "spike." Yet this is the slang name for it. Properly speaking, a "spike" is the name that should be applied to such teams as you find working in iron or drag wagons, when the driver rides the near horse and drives the lead horse with a jerk line.

Hopkinson Smith Talks Again.  
Washington Post.  
Mr. Smith is quite a spirited champion of the unspeakable Turk, and caused quite a sensation by his reported remarks concerning missionaries in a Boston paper. Mr. Smith was interviewed by a Post reporter last evening at the home of Thomas Nelson Page, on Massachusetts avenue, where he is stopping.

While he was not reported exactly as I wished to be understood," said Mr. Smith, "I sympathize strongly with the Turks. The best-managed, best-mannered, best-dressed, and, withal, most modest, unassuming man I ever knew was a Turk. I spent a month in Constantinople this fall, and was never more surprised than by my treatment there. The Sultan, in spite of misrepresentations, is a very humane and well-meaning man. It is impossible for him to control these Armenian outbreaks, which were augmented largely by English sympathy which they have for interest in their cause. I was in Constantinople at the time the Stamboul riot broke out when armed Armenians, who came ostensibly to present a peaceable petition to the Sublime Porte, opened fire on the police who tried to take them out of line.

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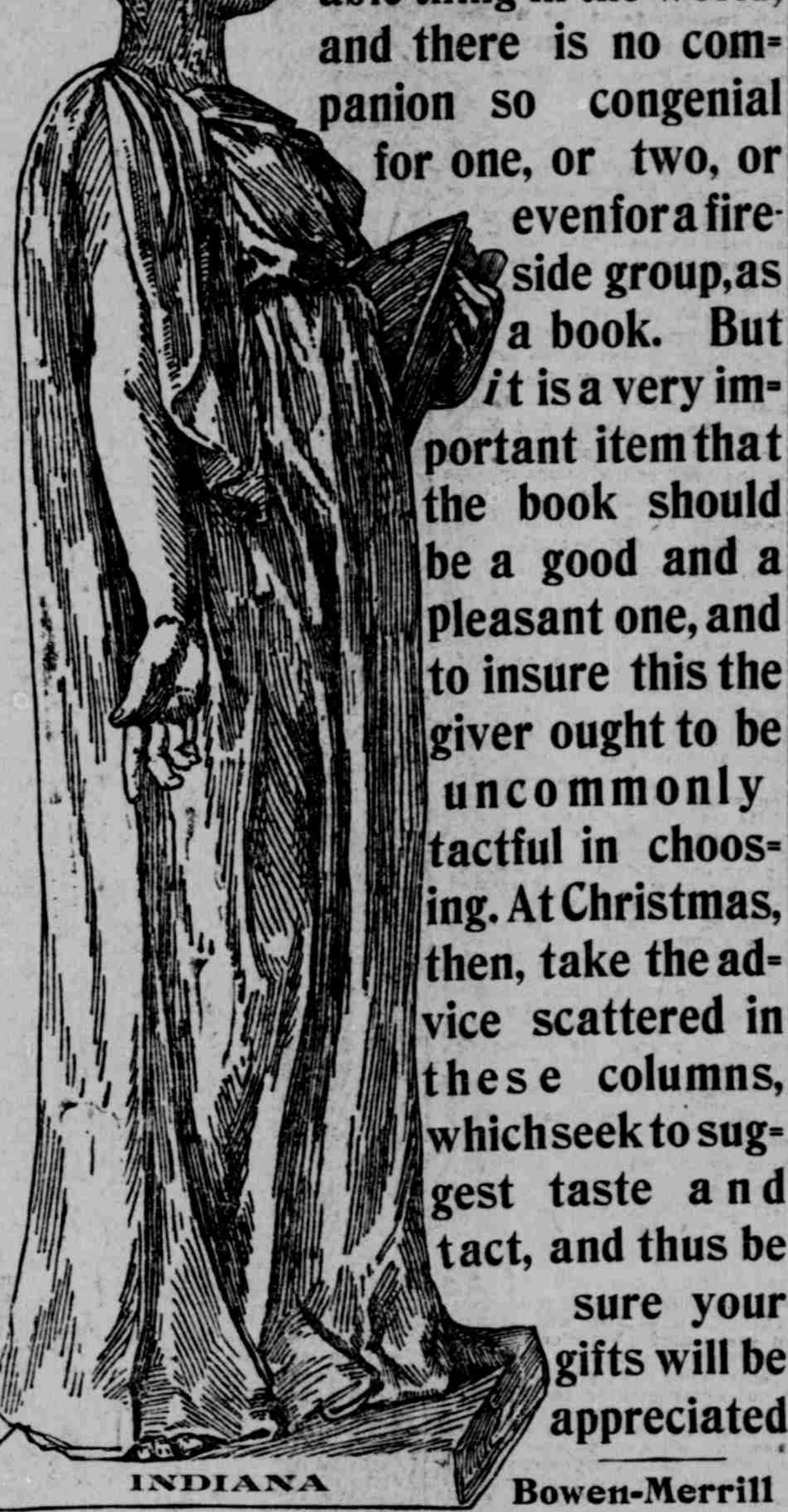
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